

What happens now? Biden drops out of '24 presidential race

Episode #117



ON THE BALLOT

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Podcast Transcript

117: Morrissey

Festa: Welcome to On the Ballot with Ballotpedia, where we connect people to politics by providing neutral, nonpartisan, and reliable information on our government, how it works, and where it's headed. I'm Frank Festa, and thanks for being with us. President Joe Biden has officially withdrawn from the 2024 race for the White House as of earlier today.

I'm joined now by BP staff writer Ellen Morrissey for a quick interview on everything you need to know about what happens next. Hey Ellen, thanks for coming on the show. Thanks for having me. Yeah. You're really busy right now. I'm glad we could get some of your time. You're working on the weekend. So thank you for putting in the extra hours.

Morrissey: Hey, no problem.

Festa: Obviously nobody better on our team to have on the show and tell us a little bit about what happened. I know most people listening obviously have been following the news all day today, but break it down for us. Well, how did things actually play out?

Morrissey: Well, earlier today, as of recording, we're recording on Sunday, July 21st, earlier today, Biden released a statement saying he is withdrawing from the presidential race.

In his statement, he said he'll be focusing more on his duties as president. Um, the lead up to this kind of started a couple of weeks ago after the first presidential debate. Some Democratic Party officials and office holders were disappointed with Biden's performance at the debate, and so we saw a kind of.

A, uh, slew of incumbent members of Congress, uh, individuals like that coming out and publicly saying Biden should withdraw. So that's kind of been, the pressure's kind of been building for a couple weeks and, and today we saw the result of that.

Festa: So has anything like this happened before in American history or is this actually the first time?

Morrissey: Short answer is this has never happened before. I think the closest comparable situation would be 1972, a couple weeks after the Democratic National Convention that year. The vice presidential nominee, Thomas Eagleton, uh, withdrew from the race after some news reports about mental health treatment he had received.

But, you know, it was kind of different with the vice presidential nominee. The presidential campaign just chose a new nominee. Uh, definitely a bit more of a straightforward process there. A kind of interesting situation that definitely happened at a very different phase of the election. Could also be In 1872, Horace Greeley, who was a presidential candidate who, uh, did not win the presidential race.

In the, between the election day and the counting of electoral votes, he passed away. So, there was a lot of kind of uncertainty about how exactly those electors needed to vote. Some of them voted for Greeley. Well, others said, Oh, I'm actually voting for someone else. It, you know, ultimately didn't really matter because Greeley didn't actually win a majority of electoral votes, but just kind of an interesting, similar situation.

Festa: Really interesting history there. We should say that while he withdrew in that statement that he issued, President Joe Biden did endorse his vice president Kamala Harris to be the new nominee, but that doesn't automatically make her the nominee, right? How does it actually work? What happens next in terms of, you know, nominating or someone becoming the eventual nominee to be the top of the Democratic ticket?

Morrissey: Yeah, so, unlike the office of the presidency, um, there's not a kind of formal line of succession for a presidential nominee. So, Vice President Kamala Harris does not just automatically become the Democratic nominee. Although, I'm sure getting the nomination from the former Democratic nominee certainly helps her case.

Some commentators are kind of predicting that Harris will kind of have a smooth path to the nomination, while others have brought up the possibility of there being kind of a more competitive open convention with a couple of candidates throwing their hats into the ring. As of recording, I don't think we have a solid answer on which of those situations we'll be dealing with in the coming weeks.

Festa: So even if Kamala does get the nomination, there's still going to be an open seat on her ticket, right? So I'd imagine that the leading candidates for vice president would also be the top picks to replace her potentially if she is going to be the nomination, right? So what names are you hearing early on?

Morrissey: I've seen a lot of buzz around, um, some incumbent governors in the Midwest and the South. Um, a quick, you know, list of hits here that is by no means comprehensive, but just some of the names I've seen. Uh, we've got California Governor Gavin Newsom, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, Illinois Governor J. B.

Pritzker. North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper, Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, and Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro. Um, we've also, I've also seen some talk about some U. S. Senators in swing states, such as John Ossoff or Raphael Warnock out of Georgia, or even Mark Kelly out of Arizona.

By no means comprehensive, but a sample of the names I've seen.

Festa: It's a long list, and I think that there might be even more names, you know, coming out on Monday that might be jumping in, so it's going to be a story to follow. All week, that's going to be changing every single day. But, August 19th, just about a month from today, the Democratic National Convention is set to start.

How do things change for them in terms of their plans? Is it back to the drawing board? It seems like they got a lot of work to do.

Morrissey: Yeah. So things were a bit up in the air, even before Biden's announcement today, Democrats were still figuring out when exactly they would

hold their delegate vote, which is kind of the official point at which all of the delegates cast their votes for the nominee and the nominee is officially selected, although they were planning on doing it virtually sometime before August 7th, um, instead of at the Democratic National Convention, um, which is kind of.

The typical schedule, but, uh, DNC Chairman Jamie Harrison today said, uh, that this process will be governed by established rules and procedures of the party. Our delegates are prepared to take seriously their responsibility in swiftly delivering a candidate to the American people. Uh, Harrison also said that Further details would come in the coming days.

Under current rules, delegates are currently unbound. A vast majority of delegates were previously bound to Biden. Now that he's withdrawn, um, they're unbound and they can vote for pretty much whoever they like. Um, so depending on kind of what kind of field of candidates we see, you know, I think it could be a situation where.

You know, if pretty much everyone lines up behind Harris, then it'll be a pretty easy, straightforward vote where a majority of delegates vote for Harris. But if we see kind of a wider field of candidates, then we could see. multiple rounds of voting in order for a candidate to officially become the nominee.

They need to win a majority of delegate votes at the convention or the virtual roll call. So it's possible there could be multiple rounds of voting until a candidate reaches that threshold.

Festa: Biden's campaign has obviously been up and running up until today, and that is a lot of time for him to collect contributions to his campaign.

You told me just before our conversation that his current cash on hand is set at 96 million. That's a lot of money. What happens to their stockpile now?

Morrissey: So how that money is handled will depend on who becomes the nominee. Um, if it's Harris, they can pretty much Continue as normal. Currently that campaign committee has Joe Biden and Kamala Harris's name on it.

So either one of them can spend the money in support of one of their presidential campaigns. If someone else were to be the Democratic nominee for president. That cash would have to be transferred elsewhere. Um, some of the options I've seen discussed are, uh, transferring all of that money to the Democratic National Committee and having the national party kind of go and spend it on behalf of both the campaign at the top of the ticket and potentially campaigns further down the ticket.

Or another option could be, uh, transforming that campaign committee into a super PAC. Which would be allowed to make a kind of unlimited independent expenditures, but it would be limited in how much money both the Democratic National Committee and the PAC would be limited in how much money they could directly contribute to a new presidential campaign.

So. Spending that money in support of someone other than Kamala Harris would introduce some kind of limits on, on how much money could go to the campaign.

Festa: That's a lot of information jam packed in just a quick episode here. Um, there's really so much we could get into and so many hypotheticals, but it's just going to be a story that we're going to have to follow, uh, every day this week.

And we know you're going to be following it as closely as anybody. So, thank you. Thank you for making some time for us here on a Sunday. We really appreciate it.

Morrissey: Hey, thanks so much for having me.

Festa: Yeah, of course. And for our listeners, you can learn more about our coverage of the presidential race and President Joe Biden dropping out of the race at the links in the show notes.

We'll be back later this week with another episode. Make sure you subscribe to On the Ballot wherever you listen to podcasts. I'm Frank Festa and thanks for listening. We'll see you later this week.